

## Parallel Realities

The stuporous fog, accumulated from 20 hours and 9000 miles of jet travel and plane food, clears abruptly with the first breath of cool moist morning air. Dawn is breaking over Lake Victoria and the smell of the beach; the cries of the gulls and the crimson clouds of sunrise all are welcoming me back to Uganda. A single step, the first one off the plane, marks the edge between the first world of home, comfort and security to the developing world with it's own riches and HIV, poverty, and compelling work. A single step off the plane and back to another home.

That single step marks a jolting shift in consciousness from the languor of long travel to 100 % attention to everything. The immigration stamp lacks an expiry date this time. HmMMMM. The bags are first off the belt, and no one is even at the Customs desk, so it is only moments from that first step to the sea of black faces waiting in the early light to greet this planeload. And quickly out of the sea, seeing us long before we would recognize him, emerges Elias, broad smile and prolonged, firm hug from a trusted driver. The work driving our friends and colleagues and us these last months has helped him build a new home and keep his kids in school. What a difference to be greeted by familiarity.

The early hour makes the beginning of the drive on Entebbe road beautiful, in contrast to the usual jarring traffic. A giant golden ball of sunrise come to us over a hill top, coloring the black and white casqued hornbill that comes to greet us bright orange. It is just 6:30 am but already now people are walking everywhere. As we approach Kampala the walkers, now a throng, and street vendors at our windows, compete with jam-packed minibuses, goats, bicycles and trucks swerving around potholes, and creeping along exhaust filled, roadways.



Gridlock is just ahead, and barely avoided with a faintly remembered short cut. Groups of school children amble along, their shaved haircuts presenting an array of bouncing black balls. Smells of smoke from trash burning, black diesel clouds, cattle, goats and sewage all mix in the sultry air from the fresh rain. Rain that has washed the pavement clean for our arrival. Rain that has made all the hills appear as a verdant botanic garden, the matoke plantations a thriving shining green abundance, and the familiar red dirt a deeper, darker crimson. Rain that has no doubt soaked and chilled to the bones the poor along the road who have little to wear and no where

to go.

All of this in an instant as my reality shifts. Shifts from Boulder, Colorado and Cortes Island, British Columbia. Completely gone is the calm and quiet, the orderliness and luxury of the developed world, where people are in their cars, usually one per car, and rarely seen walking. Gone the broad high-speed freeways, efficient and functioning utilities, and gone...so many comforts. Gone are the fishing trips, workouts in fancy outfits at fancy gyms, fine restaurants, theatres and spas. In a single step life for most is now about survival, not consumerism and consumption.

It is fascinating to me that these separate realities exist in parallel. At the very moment in America when everyone is plugged into their I Pods, walkmans, cell phones or CNN, the people in Uganda are tuned into the traffic sounds behind them and when to step off onto the shoulder, a conversation overheard with a possible opportunity for a step up, or their exuberant cell phones ringing the latest rock tunes. Parallel realities: the melody of an ice cream truck or a rooster crowing, the mad confusion of traffic circles designed long ago for one tenth this many vehicles or orderly green and red lights, turn lanes and traffic law enforcement, the smiling, singing, high-5's and bright eyed faces on the streets of Kampala or the frozen, expressionless, seemingly emotionless looks on millions of commuters on subways and in elevators.

Fascinating questions arise. How is it that all this can be going on at the very same time, and that it is only where I open my eyes that determines what I see? That where I was born determines so much of my life? How can we begin to understand the oneness of humanity with all these parallel realities seeming so different?

And it is fascinating to watch inside my mind. "I like this better." "That is really my home." "My work is here." "There." "I belong here." "There." "I am happier here." "There". Fascinating. Transitions are a fertile field.

And it is transition time again as Torkin and I return to our work here in Uganda. She will regularly update you about BeadforLife in the "Bead" so please subscribe at [www.beadforlife.com](http://www.beadforlife.com) <<http://www.beadforlife.com/>> if you don't already get it. I will from time to time send you stories and reflections from the frontline of the HIV care roll out. Let me know e-mail addresses to add or delete.

And we both send you love,

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"We are the ones we've been waiting for."